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Calif ornia Climber
FALL 2012
N° 02

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Eric Berghorn on Hailstone Arete (5.9+), Hatston Rock, Mount Saint Helena.
IMAGE + Jerry Dodrill

THIS PAGE:
Patrick Brown after climbing Robbin’s Crack (5.10), Mount Woodson.
IMAGE + Dean Fleming

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qualified professional instruction and/or guidance. Understand-
ing the risks involved are necessary and be prepared to
assume all responsibility associated with those risks.

Adam Thomason gets Ambushed (V9 Fa), Hartley Springs, Mam-
moth. See page 59. IMAGE © Charlie Barrett

CA. born
- CA. raised

our climbing roots go deep.
IN THE SUMMER OF 1880, the legendary novelist Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife Fanny spent their honeymoon at an abandoned mining camp high on the flanks of Sonoma County’s Mount Saint Helena. That summer, this author of such legendary novels including; Treasure Island, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Kidnapped, and Mr. Otto, would find inspiration for his 1883 California manuscript Silverado Squatters. Alongside Helena’s vast recreation resources and natural beauty, Stevenson’s fascination with the craggy peak has helped to preserve 5,272 acres of Helena’s wilderness with the creation of Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. Below is an excerpt from the introduction of Silverado Squatters:

The scene of this little book is on a high mountain. There are, indeed, many higher; there are many of a nobler outline. It is no place of pilgrimage for the summary globe-trotter; but to one who lives upon its sides, Mount Saint Helena soon becomes a centre of interest. It is the Mont Blanc of one section of the Californian Coast Range, none of its near neighbors rising to one-half its altitude. It looks down on much green, intricate country. It leads in the spring-time many splashing brooks. From its summit you must have an excellent lesson of geography: seeing, to the south, San Francisco Bay, with Tamalpais on the one hand and Monte Diablo on the other, to the west and thirty miles away, the open ocean; eastward, across the corn-lands and thick tule swamps of Sacramento Valley, to where the Central Pacific railroad begins to climb the sides of the Sierras; and northward, for what I know, the white head of Shasta looking down on Oregon.

For this issue’s feature article, Sebastopol-based climber, photographer and avid Mount Saint Helena route developer Jerry Dodrill, spent countless hours at the public library, flew a crash-course in a single-engine experimental RV8 aircraft and spent over 20 years fighting his way up Helena’s chaparral-covered hillsides. For more on Mount Saint Helena, one of the most scenic summit crags in the Golden State, see page 47 for Jerry’s story in the Wake of Kona’ Mota.
Where did you start climbing and how did you get into it?

I'm originally from Southern California, so my first trips were to Joshua Tree, Tahquitz and Yosemite Valley with a couple of friends, blowing out of Orange County Friday afternoons right after school in my '69 Camaro with the 8-track blasting...crazy times. It was more of a self-taught thing. I just bought some hexes and stoppers and a rope and figured it out as we went. I got a hold of Basic Rock Craft by Robbins and would thumb through it for hours, usually in class, dreaming.

Who in the previous generation did you look up to and why?

I was definitely enthralled by the Golden Age that was just wrapping up in Yosemite when I started climbing. Robbins, Chouinard, Herbert, Harding and Pratt pushed the standard, really raised the bar. You know it's funny because I was the same age as the Stone Masters and I could have slipped into all of that, but I wanted to be like the traditional crew. I looked up to Robbins and Chouinard thinking, I want to go to Patagonia and the Alps. I want to climb El Cap and Half Dome. I want to spend nights on the wall and hump bone-crushing loads all over the place. The mountaineering experience struck a chord and was right for me.

When did you decide that you were going to go high and steep forever?

It all came together in '75 when I was 17. I was climbing in Joshua Tree every weekend and making character-building attempts on El Cap. But I was also doing long backpacking trips and mountaineering climbs. That's when I did the Pacific Crest Trail solo. It was like "this is who I am." There's never been a year where I have taken a break or had to re-think whether the mountain life was right for me. I've never had a time where I had to get back into it. Everything has always led to the next step. I suppose you could say my "mid-life crisis," where you realize you'd better make the most of life, hit me when I was a teenager.

Has that focus and consistency put you in the leadership role for most of your bigger trips?

I think I've been in somewhat of a leadership role from the beginning, in the sense that I'm always thinking of some next big trip to do. The joke was always: "Ah ha! Another hair-brained idea from Nettle." Climbing has been the catalyst for a long string of amazing friends in my life.

You've traveled all over the world climbing and skiing; many would say that your lifestyle is unorthodox. What sacrifices have you made to live the way you do?

I won't say that I've sacrificed. That sounds too negative. Plus, I've never had to stand at that threshold of "well, it's school or the mountains." I just made it work. But it's fair to say that there are
things that I don’t have time for. I don’t make time to watch TV for example. You have to draw a line on where you are going to put your time and energy.”

How do you make all the international travel work with your budget?

There’s no hidden money under my mattress! if the budget’s there I’ll go to Kyrgyzstan, if it’s not I’ll climb the Sierra backcountry. It’s finding what you love and love what you find. I don’t see climbing as being something extra in my life. It’s something that I need and want to do. It’s about finding a balance and then making the most of it. Being organized helps.

You have done a lot of ascents in the mountains that have required an ability to climb light and fast when the weather window was right. Do you think this kind of climbing was fostered in California?

I definitely think so. I remember seeing this quote from Chouinard in the ‘70s on a Patagonia skyline poster that more or less said: “Yosemite Valley will be the training ground for a new generation of super-alpinists who will venture forth to the high mountains of the world to do the most aesthetic and difficult walls on the face of the earth” and thinking: “I want to be a part of that!” The climbing standards and attitude in Yosemite helped that along. Partly because of the weather, and the granite. You can walk up to a 3,000 foot cliff with just a liter of water and a windbreaker and go: “Okay, you’re on belay.” The flip side of light and fast in the high mountains is that you have to be tuned in to when to bail and try again. If you push it too far and the weather turns, you’re hating it. Cerro Torre in Patagonia took me and Bean Bowers five back-to-back attempts in ten days – a huge energy investment. To climb in a light-and-fast style takes being prepared to put in the time. Be patient, then rally and charge hard.

You have done quite a few first ascents in California and abroad. What motivates you to climb new routes?

I remember thinking: “If only I was born twenty years earlier there would be so much to do. I’m just a little too late.” But along the way I’ve realized that there are beautiful unclimbed routes and so many more new adventures to experience for every generation if you have the vision. Take the Hulk. There were only a couple of routes on it when I discovered it for myself. Now there are over 20 routes and it’s pretty popular – what a treat to have enjoyed that place as it was being developed. I’m still motivated and currently finding amazing new lines here in the Sierra and beyond.

The big mountains can be frustrating when the weather doesn’t cooperate. How do you deal with getting shut down by storms?

I certainly want to achieve the goal that I’ve set out to climb and am not one to give up easily. But I’ve certainly had my share of weathered-out trips. You learn skills from that, like how to make an orderly retreat. It can be desperate, but after a few of those you can stay relaxed and say with confidence: we can get through this. You go slow, take your time. There’s a way of handling it having been through it a few times.

In the world of high-end alpinism, sponsorship seems to be instrumental in the funding of expeditions, yet you have no sponsors. How does that work?

I don’t want to be committed in that way. For me climbing and adventure is about freedom and independence, and I think some of that gets lost in trying to satisfy what the public is looking for and what sponsors are expecting. I like the ability to go anywhere and change my plans completely if I want to! I don’t want to have to spin it like: “I got this deal with Red Bull, we’re gonna take eight poodles and jump off El Cap.” My spin is that I want it to be fun with good friends.
REVIEW

LIGHT QUICKDRAWS

A FEW YEARS AGO A RACK OF CAMS, chalks and draws was a weighty jumble to be slung over the shoulder. Nowadays, that weight has been greatly reduced with the advent of much lighter SLCs and carabiners. Moreover, the incorporation of lightweight materials such as Dyneema has maintained strength, while decreasing the bulk and weight of quickdraws and slings. With that in mind, CCMA® has reviewed nine cutting-edge draws that will appeal to a variety of different climbers and styles of climbing. If it’s time to lighten up the rack, the information below will help you select the proper draws to do just that.

A NOTE ON ITEMS REVIEWED:
Originally we wanted this review to be exclusive to the lightest draws available in North America. However, during the research and review process, CCMA® testers varied considerably in what they found to be “user-friendly” products. While many testers favored the lightest draws available, some chose heavier draws over their lighter counterparts because they were easier to clip and rack. As a result, we expanded the parameters of the review to include slightly heavier draws that have larger gate openings and deeper baskets. Almost all of the products in this review come in a number of different dog bone lengths - some even come with sling options. For consistency, we have selected those in the 10 to 13cm lengths as those seem to be the go to standard for most climbers in California.

MAMMUT - MOSES
This draw wins the editor’s choice award. The weight, size, strength and durability of the Moses made this draw a favorite with all testers. Additionally, Mammut’s rubber gaskets are super tough and do not break when the lower biner is pulled.

- PRICE: $21.95
- WEIGHT: 59g
- STRENGTH: 24/9kN
- DOG BONE: 10cm
- GATE OPENING: 28.5mm

MAD ROCK - ULTRA LIGHT
This draw wins the economy award. Despite issues with the rubber gasket breaking when removing the lower biner, the Ultra Light hit with all testers as the go-to for climbers on a tight budget. A full size gate opening and medium weight make this draw a great choice.

- PRICE: $13.95
- WEIGHT: 70g
- STRENGTH: 25/7kN
- DOG BONE: 12.5cm
- GATE OPENING: 25mm

FIXE - MINOR
The Minor fit well with redpoint climbers working routes and repeatedly whipping. The broad surface at the bend of the biner took both hanger beatings well. External gasket prevented break down when removing the lower biner.

- PRICE: $19.00
- WEIGHT: 68g
- STRENGTH: 24/9kN
- DOG BONE: 10.8cm
- GATE OPENING: 28.5mm
METOLIUS - FS MINI
A very close second for lightest draw, the FS Mini was very popular with backcountry climbers. Metolius offers a small-to-big biner option with the FS Mini and the Inferno which has a gate opening of 27mm. The price is right, as is the weight.

- PRICE: $14.95
- WEIGHT: 56g
- STRENGTH: 22/7kN
- DOG BONE: 10cm
- GATE OPENING: 17mm

PETZL - ANGE
One tester commented that “the helium clean wire is the best multi-medium draw on the market.” It can be clipped with a glove on, the nose is keyed (so no snagging) and it’s really light, especially for a full-sized draw. No doubt, it was a favorite with all testers, but price is an issue.

- PRICE: $25.95
- WEIGHT: 63g
- STRENGTH: 20/7kN
- DOG BONE: 10cm
- GATE OPENING: 26mm

WILD COUNTRY - HELIUM CLEAN WIRE
This is the most unique draw in the review. With a single wire gate – opposed to the standard loop – this draw addresses the issue of gate rebound brake down. Its keyed nose makes cleaning a breeze, while the wide gate opening and deep basket make clipping a nonissue. Price is the biggest knock against this innovative draw.

- PRICE: $25.95
- WEIGHT: 61g
- STRENGTH: 20/7kN
- DOG BONE: 10cm
- GATE OPENING: 27mm

CAMP USA - NANO EXPRESS 23
The lightest draw in the review. Backcountry climbers enjoyed the reduced weight and profile on the rack. Others found the smaller gate size hard to clip and clove hitch. CAMP offers the Mach Express Draw which combines the smaller Nano with the larger Mach biner. Clip the small biner to the gear and clip the rope with ease to the Mach, which has a gate opening of 29mm.

- PRICE: $16.95
- WEIGHT: 55g
- STRENGTH: 20/7kN
- DOG BONE: 12cm
- GATE OPENING: 23mm

PETZL - HOODWIRE
BD has come up with a unique nose design to eliminate snagging when cleaning. Tests proved this design effective. Although heavier than others in review, this draw proved easy to clip. A tough and durable draw.

- PRICE: $19.95 (MSRP)
- WEIGHT: 82g
- STRENGTH: 24/8kN
- DOG BONE: 10cm
- GATE OPENING: 24mm

TRANGO SUPERFLY
A classic, functional, all-around draw. This set-up can handle a surprising amount of abuse considering its lightweight frame. Equally suitable for backcountry and sport climbing.

- PRICE: $21.95
- WEIGHT: 69g
- STRENGTH: 24/7kN
- DOG BONE: 12.7cm
- GATE OPENING: 25mm
CREATURE COMFORTS

STRUANDED IN STYLE

Benighted! The word alone can make a climber shiver. However, if you like climbing long routes, becoming swamped in darkness is bound to happen. In these situations, a grade five free team can be left with only a single set of stoppers, a double set of cams, a bit of water and an extra layer. With that in mind, CCMag has developed a simple throw-back to the golden age that will help ease the pains of sleeping in a harness. The following is a ten-step guide to turn your rope into a crude hammock.

To set-up this hammock you need two horizontal anchor points that are ideally 6-feet apart.

1. The member not using the hammock is going to have to untie from his or her end of the rope. That person needs to tie into the primary anchor in an alternative manner.
2. Take the end of the rope still tied to your person, draw a comfortable length of line to allow you to do your work and tie it into the anchor.
3. Tie an overhand figure eight a few feet from the anchor point and clip it into a loose sling hung from the same anchor.
4. Payout around 6-feet, tie an overhand knot and clip that into another sling hung from a secondary anchor built off to the side. Repeat this task going back and forth between the two anchor points. Do this until there are seven or so even loops of rope stretching between the two anchors.
5. Run one last loop six inches longer than the rest and neatly coil the remaining rope in a tight bundle for the weaving process.
6. Bring the coil a third of the way down the longest (last) loop and connect it with a couple of clove hitches and a biner – this secures the point from which the weave will start.
7. Take the coil of remaining rope and begin an over-under weave through the seven loops hanging between the two anchor points. Keep the weave somewhat loose. Repeat this process going back and forth until the center third of the loops is woven together in a mat.
8. This process will use up almost all of a sixty meter rope, so tie it off with a couple of clove hitches and a biner just like when you started. If you have a seventy meter rope, you’ll have some extra line.
9. After tying off the end of the weave, use the extra line to hang two or three more loops on the outside of the hammock – this will give you a means to stretch out your legs as you lean into the narrow hammock.
10. Finally, adjust your tether to the main anchor to the appropriate length and settle in for some Zs.

If your belay site does not accommodate two anchor points, then the hammock becomes a traditional single-point belay seat. If this is the case, simply shorten the length of the loops in the hammock design and increase their numbers. If no tag line is available, narrow the hammock to allow enough rope to build one for your partner below your own. This will decrease the comfort of your nest, but will likely make the next day’s climbing more pleasant; your partner won’t hate your cheery, well-rested face and will be able to stay awake to feed out rope while you’re leading.

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TOMMY CALDWELL

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The American Safe Climbing Association (ASCA) is a bare bones non-profit organization of dedicated climbers who replace unsafe anchors and reduce the visual and environmental impacts of climbing. Continuing their impressive efforts over the years, the ASCA has placed over 13,000 bolts across the country and internationally.

So far this year, the following areas have received bolts thanks to the many hours of volunteer climbers. Help us support them, so they can continue to keep our crags a safe place to climb!

In 2012:
- 362 titanium glue-ins placed in Thailand
- 230 bolts in Yosemite Valley
- 146 bolts on 20 different routes in Moab & Indian Creek
- 50-100 bolts in Red Rocks, NV
- 100+ bolts to small crags around California, Colorado, Arizona and North Carolina.

With special guest speaker
TOMMY CALDWELL

Tommy Caldwell & Kevin Jorgeson working on a Free Dawn Wall, El Capitan. Photo by Rebecca Caldwell.
STAND BY YOUR VAN

“SHREK”
Mark Bauer and Phyllis Shafer’s Mobile Mountain Mansion

This Fall CCMag is celebrating one of the baddest beasts on the rocky roads of the California climbing scene. We’ve all seen the glorious Sportsmobile (all business on the outside with an interior of luscious comfort) and thought: “some day.” Thanks to Tahoe-based climber Mark Bauer and Phyllis Shafer, here’s an inside look at the car you’ve been dreaming about since your first climbing road trip.

CC: To start off, what’s the year, make and model of your van and what did you pay for it?
Mark: It’s a 1999, Ford 350, 4X4, diesel van. We paid more money for this van than we ever thought we would pay for a vehicle, but it has been worth every penny!

Does your van have a name?
Yeah, it’s Shrek. He’s big and green and when you are driving down the road with the sun at your back, he casts a shadow that looks exactly like the shape of Shrek’s head. We adopted the name from the previous owners because it just seems to fit.

What upgrades did you guys and/or the previous owner make?
Shrek’s first owners were surfers. They had made a few modifications to carry surfboards inside, which we later changed. They also added a solar panel on the top which partially runs the refrigerator and interior lights. We added a furnace, awning, cabinets, and an external metal storage box. Shrek also has a 55 gal gas tank, gas stove and a terrific sound system which sure is nice when you are tootling down the road or hanging out at camp.

Why did you pick Shrek?
We had been looking at Sportsmobiles for quite a while and thinking it was the vehicle for us due to the high-clearance, 4X4 aspect. We also wanted a van that could accommodate both our needs: climbing trips and plein air painting (landscape painting on location). We like the sturdiness of the Sportsmobile and the streamline efficiency of the interior space.

How has this vehicle enhanced your experience on the road?
Having done a lot of camping in the past, starting with tents, back-of-trucks, and a GMC van, Shrek has allowed us more comfort without sacrificing the desire to get to remote spots. The bed is comfortable, the pop-top allows for stand-up room and guest sleeping quarters “upstairs.” The heater makes it usable throughout more seasons, and yet it is relatively efficient and easy to drive. The solar panel makes it easy to park it and not have to worry about running down the batteries.

What’s Shrek’s MPG?
Approximately 16-18. Not the best, but the 55 gal tank allows us to go a long ways between fill-ups.

What’s one experience that you’ve had in Shrek that you were like: “this van is awesome!”
All of our trips in Shrek have convinced us that he is perfectly suited to our lifestyle. As a plein air painter Phyllis needs a vehicle that can get her to the places she wants to paint. Because she prefers to paint on larger sized canvases, she needs a vehicle that can easily store paintings and provide a comfortable set-up to maximize the painting time.

What’s Shrek’s MPG?
Approximately 16-18. Not the best, but the 55 gal tank allows us to go a long ways between fill-ups.

What’s one experience that you’ve had in Shrek that you were like: “this van is awesome!”

Oh man, this van will have readers cutting back on the cobra and squirreling away their extra dough in hopes of finding Shrek’s kin for a deal. What a sick ride. Thanks for sharing...

Hope you guys don’t mind if I crash in the loft for a night or two next time I catch you on the Eastside. Oh, I’m just kidding. But seriously, let me know where you’re camping.

Photo by Lidija Grazulis  www.grazulis.com
Elliott Perucca, Silk Banana, VS, Mount Woodson

Tom Murphy, Green Arch (5.11), Tahquitz Rock
John Scott, Ginsu (5.12b FA), Hidden Dome IMAGE + Jim Thornburg

Mike Penning, Asleep at the Wheel (V 5.12 FA), Mt. Chamberlin IMAGE + Chris Brown
HARD AS NAILS
MOUNT WOODSON’S CRACKED JELLY BEANS
WORDS & IMAGES + Dean Fleming

Kevin Fawcett jams Robbin’s Crack (V0)
“Here we are!” said Elliot, as he banked left and shot down a steep gully. Earlier in the day, I met Elliot Carlsen and three other San Diego-based climbers nearby at Highway 67 for a tour of Mount Woodson, one of Southern California’s oldest bouldering areas. Now close to dusk and halfway up Woodson’s south flank, we stopped at the road’s edge to watch Elliot running down the scree slope, gracefully snatching scrub oaks and bushes for balance.

“I’ve descended North Dome Gully, roofed houses and hiked an 11-mile push all in my flip-flops. On most days, I find better balance and friction with these trusty kicks than any modern approach shoes. But with five large crashpads between us — what seemed to be the necessary amount for surviving Woodson’s notorious highballs — we would follow Elliot into the gully with that familiar sense of lopsidedness only a monster pad or haulbag can render.

Hesitant but faithful, I was the first to drop in after Elliot. A few feet from the paved road, I clutched a sticker bush for balance. My left flop flipped, I cursed, stumbled and slammed my knee into a glassy rock. Quickly picking up speed in the pebbly gully, I slid like a runner headed for home plate, raking my side for 15 feet until I crashed into a talus pile.

Venturing into uncharted territories typically demands crashpad-tossing jungle warfare.

Hundreds of boulders are scattered along this ridge, yet unlike the Buttermilks — with their ideally sculpted sandy landscape — a heavy brush comprised of chaparral, scrub oak, manzanita and poison oak dominates the undergrowth. Simply finding the approach trails leading to Mount Woodson’s established boulders can be quite confusing. Venturing into uncharted territories typically demands crashpad-tossing jungle warfare.

Since the early ’60s, generations of local climbers and top-ropers have stormed these rugged hillsides to climb new routes. Hundreds of problems have been established along Woodson’s summit road, yet because of the incredibly thick underbrush, the climbs closest to this road remain the major attraction for most visitors. Unfortunately, many of the boulders south of Mount Woodson are within private property boundaries.

“Remember that huge boulder I pointed out on the way up? The one sticking out of the bushes?” Elliot asked, as I brushed the dirt from my pants and rubbed a growing bruise on my knee. “Oh yeah… sure,” I replied. There were hundreds of huge boulders on the hillside that fit Elliot’s description exactly, but knowing Elliot, if we were dragging five huge crashpads through the jungle, there was a good chance we were headed toward something spectacular.

Just shy of an orange house-sized block, we set up an assembly line to toss the pads over a triangle-shaped rock. Shouldering our pads once again, we traversed the northwest corner of the massive feature, now fighting a full-grown stand of oak trees. Always careful not to send a branch zipping back into a friend’s face, we crashed through the last section of brush and stumbled into an open hole in the vegetation. Cutting the near-vertical face of the house-sized block for over 25 feet, the crack started razor-thin, gradually widened to small fingers, then finally to locker fingers as it arched through a bulge at the 20-foot mark.

Dan Beall goes for broke on the 30-foot Curtains for Certain (5.12c/V5).

Elliott Perucca on Baby Robbin’s (V0).
The summit road can be absolutely featureless. Many are so dreadfully sheer that one might be so bold to label sections unclimbable. That is, until California powerhouse Ethan Pringle, Chris Lindner (who grew up in a house near the base of Mount Woodson) and Poway resident Dan Beall made their way up the winding road to climb some “unclimbable” slabs, punchy arêtes and smooth overhangs. Their efforts have added double-digit bouldering and a slew of new-age classics, redefining this old-school crag with high-quality modern bouldering.

Circumnavigating the base of almost any boulder at Mount Woodson will usually reveal a perfect hand, fist or finger crack. Or, if you’re lucky, a series of crimps leading up an otherwise impossible face. Many of the cracks and technical face climbs at Mount Woodson are perfectly uniform, tall and intimidating. That harrowing height that’s too short to justify lead climbing but tall enough to break an ankle. In other words, Mount Woodson hosts an unprecedented amount of perfect highball bouldering. And for those wiling to fight the brush: decades of first ascents.

Woodson isn’t regarded for its steep and powerful boulder problems, in fact, it’s pretty rare to find overhanging climbing on Woodson’s glassy eggs. Reminiscent of cracked jelly beans, the smooth pebbles that dot the summit road can be absolutely featureless. Many are so dreadfully sheer that one might be so bold to label sections unclimbable. That is, until California powerhouse like Ethan Pringle, Chris Lindner (who grew up in a house near the base of Mount Woodson) and Poway resident Dan Beall made their way up the winding road to climb some “unclimbable” slabs, punchy arêtes and smooth overhangs. Their efforts have added double-digit bouldering and a slew of new-age classics, redefining this old-school crag with high-quality modern bouldering.

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Three must-visit clusters of high quality boulders just a few feet from the main road.

The Vision (5.12), a 5.12+ shallow dihedral with hard/thin crack climbing and sustained crack climbing, this route is manageable as a boulder problem. If you’re like me, you’ll gladly clip the two shiny bolts and toprope the hell out of it.

On the same boulder, about 40 feet to the right of The Vision, sits the perfect layback flake of Razor’s Edge (5.10c). With a few well-placed pads and some spotters, this climb is a much safer boulder problem than its 35 foot neighbor. A little over 10 feet of strenuous but secure laybacking leads to five feet of easy jugs and a perfect topout. If you’re just breaking into the grade or lack the appropriate pads, a two bolt anchor at the lip allows for simple top roping. 50 feet up-and-right of the Train Boulder, discover the excellent fingers of Black Finger (5.10a). This climb is manageable as a boulder problem for anyone climbing the grade.

Baby Robbin’s: Until about a year ago, the Baby Robbin’s area hosted three excellent routes: the namesake Baby Robbin’s (5.9), Jaws (5.11a) and I Would Die for You (5.12). Then, on May 30, 2011, Dan Beall slapped his way up the gorgeous right arête of Jaws, establishing Asylum (V10) — one of the most aesthetic new-age boulder problems in the region. On mountain-project.com, Dan describes the route: “Start sitting at the arête just right of Jaws with a very low right-hand edge and a left-hand sloper/undercill near the bottom of the Jaws crack. The crux is probably mental, as the high jump move is committing, though physically the line is sustained.”

Jaws (5.11a) and Baby Robbin’s (V0) are both absolutely perfect hand and finger cracks. Both are located on the same boulder — in fact, they are the same crack - a north-facing and south-facing fracture that splits one massive egg. Like most “boulder problems” at Woodson, it’s acceptable to lead or toprope these climbs. Pads easily protect Baby Robbin’s while Jaws is a little spooky un-roped. Consider a toprope burn on Jaws if you’re breaking into the grade.

THE PLAYGROUND: The Playground, an area surrounding the Painted Boulders, was the main hangout during the ’86 Mount Woodson Climbing Competition. Including variations there are probably a thousand routes here. The Playground holds near-infinite possibilities for slab-mastery, with about 12 stand-out lines. Some classics include Syncopation, a striking V4 arête with an overhanging start marked by a lone, barely reachable black knob; American Gypsy, a 5.13+ shallow dihedral with hard/thin crack climbing and laybacking, and The Vision, a 5.12 slab that’s better off top roped.
GETTING THERE:
From San Diego take Highway 8 east (or Highway 52 east) to the Highway 67 junction. Head north on 67 for about 18 miles until you crest a huge hill littered with boulders (this should be obvious). Just after you begin to head down the east side, park on the left (northwest) side of Highway 67 at a sign marked “hiking trail.” I’m serious. Hike up (heading south along Highway 67) until you reach a paved road. This road leads to the summit of Mount Woodson and the established climbing areas. It’s a hell of a hike and there’s no water, so bring plenty. Cars have been vandalized at this parking area so carry your wallet with you.

WHERE TO STAY:
Very nice camping with showers and water can be found at Dos Picos County Park in Ramona, just a few miles northwest of Mount Woodson on Highway 67. From the parking lot at Mount Woodson, head north on Highway 67 for about three miles, then turn right onto Mussey Grade Road. After one mile turn right onto Dos Picos Park Road. Follow this to its end at the campground. Camping here costs $19 per night and there is zero firewood. Pack your car with friends and sticks and split the bill.

5 STAR ROUTES:
Robbin’s Crack (5.9 or V0), Jaws (5.11a or V1), Driving South (5.11d or V3), Lizard Corner (V4), The Rail Problem (V6), Asylum (V10), Uncertainty Principle (5.11c) and Stairway to Heaven (5.12b or V4).

GUIDEBOOK:
There are a couple guidebooks to the area, namely Craig Fry’s Southern California Bouldering and San Diego County Bouldering by Dave Kennedy and Chris Hubbard. Neither are comprehensive books, but both can point you in the right direction. An overview topo to Mount Woodson’s main areas can be found exclusively at Vertical Hold Climbing Gym in San Diego. Lots of images and some approach directions can be found at mountainproject.com.

THE BETA

ABOVE - Dan Beall on The Rail Problem (V6).
OPPOSITE PAGE - Kevin Fawcett on Jaws (V1).
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High in the densely forested Santa Cruz Mountains, in a cave in a squat, house-sized boulder, a shaggy-haired troglodyte awoke in the dead of night and was comforted by the sound of falling rain...
The caveman was the only human on the entire ridge, a spot he far preferred to his unhappy home down in the sprawling city below. As he lay in the dark of his dry shelter, he peered up at the ceiling and out to the dim circle of light at the cave’s entrance. In the morning, the sun shone brightly as the cave-dweller brushed oak leaves and pine needles from his hair and stretched his stiff muscles. He did a few warm-up problems then climbed the burly roof to the lip where he performed a hard mantel onto a steeply sloping shelf. When the few boulderers who were around in those days learned of the problem, it was instantly clear that it was unique, classic and very hard. It was equally obvious that it should be named after the cave-boy who slept there and first climbed it: John Yablonski.

"Yabo" was one of many great climbers to cut his teeth on the blob-like boulders at Castle Rock State Park. The fine-grained sandstone rocks and short cliffs are inevitably (and often) compared to Fontainebleau, the French bouldering area some say is the finest in the world. Indeed, the stone and climbing styles are similar, especially if you can ignore the occasional sandy patch at Castle. You’ll encounter bizarre, highly technical moves on slopers and pockets that while frustratingly hard and cryptic, are all the more satisfying once mastered. The moves are at once, complicated and basic. You’ve got to try really hard and use all your body parts. After a good day at Castle, you should have scrapes on your shins, forearms, belly and chest. Scrapes on the bottom of your chin will let your buddies know you really got after it.

Since the ’50s, the area has been a farm-league for generations of chin-scrapers. Doug Robinson, among others, explored the rocks as early as the late ’50s. In the ’60s and ’70s, Jim Birckel and Barry Bales (both visionary climbers who ushered in the 5.11 grade in Yosemite) established scores of problems, most lost to history. The Bates Arête, a V4 rising arete and roof is a gem so exceptional that it spawned and retained its simple name. In the ’80s, Charlie Scheck, Bruce Morris, Scott Cosgrove, John Yablonski, Ron Kauk, Dave Caunt and Rich Vetter found and developed boulders like those in the Klinghoffer area. An ascent by Cosgrove of the Collins Crank in the mid 1980s was likely one of the first V10 problems in the country. In the 90s, Chris Sharma, Chris Bosh, Sterling Keene and Andreas Pufel took up the torch. I had the pleasure of climbing with this group on some of their outings and would usually spend the day laughing at the absurdity of the slopers they would try to pull on. I remember Sterling pawing around on what would become the Eco-Terrorist (V10) and thinking maybe he’d smoked a bit too much. When I heard a week later that Chris had climbed it I was certain they were playing a joke on me.

Interestingly, few of each generation kept notes of their ascents - instead, fun and practice for “real” climbing were the goals. So spotty was the history, that now many of the old problems see new “first ascents” by today’s generation - a generation that continues to expand the definition of what a hold can be.
The climbing at Castle Rock doesn’t begin and end with the boulders. Scores of fun and quirky sport routes and even a few leadable cracks complete the climbing experience.

In the 80s, Bruce Morris, Dave Caunt, Brad Watson and others began to explore the bigger boulders and cliffs throughout the 3,600-acre Park, establishing nearly 100 routes that at first glance might seem pointlessly short or contrived. Less imaginative boulderers (I was once one of them) had come to the same dull-headed conclusion about these routes. Once acquired, though, the appreciation for Castle Rock sport routes is similar to that for the boulders: It’s all excellent fun. The routes range in length from 35 to 100 feet and offer friction-based face climbing challenges, with some pocket and crack climbing mixed in.

Today the park is much as it was 40 years ago. Many of the older problems have been resurrected and the sport climbs are steadily gaining in popularity. Most of all, the quiet woods remain a training ground and escape for today’s crop of young south-bay climbers. You can’t camp in the cave where Yabo did, but you can follow in his footsteps on the boulders.

**GETTING THERE:**
From the intersection of Saratoga Rd. and Ca. Highway 9 (Big Basin rd.), head west into the Nils for about seven miles to the intersection with Highway 35 (Skyline Blvd.) and turn left. After 2.6 miles you’ll see the pay parking for Castle Rock State Park (CRSP) on the right. If parking is available (get there early on weekends!) on either side of the road outside of the lot, grab a spot for free. Remember that the park closes when the sun goes down and rangers will gleefully ticket your car if you are a minute too late.

**WHERE TO STAY:**
Sanborn Park campground at, 16055 Sanborn Rd. Saratoga, CA 95070 offers both RV and walk-in campgrounds. From Castle Rock State Park take Highway 35 (Skyline Blvd) north to the Highway 9 intersection. Turn right (east) on Highway 9 (Big Basin Road); 5-miles on Highway 9 takes you to the right (south) turn-off for Sanborn Road. The campgrounds are located less than 1-mile down Sanborn Road.

**5 STAR ROUTES:**
Mr. Magoo (V1), Bates Arete (V4), Right Hand Man (V7), Eco-Terrorist (V10), The Lieback (5.7), Mullah (5.10a), Donkey Dong (5.11b). Winter, spring and fall provide the best grip conditions. DON’T CLIMB when the rocks are wet or damp, the holds are fragile when wet.

**GUIDEBOOK:**
Jim Thornburg’s new Bay Area Rock (Climbing & Bouldering) has the most up-to-date information and topos.
IT WAS A QUEST TO UNRAVEL HISTORY and give some new routes proper names. Nervously, I took the stick and banked the plane onto a fateful course directly toward Mount Saint Helena. Through a blur of prop blades I could see our local crags. I was imagining what must have been going through the minds of the two young pilots as they descended through turbulent clouds over 50 years ago. They would have been sitting exactly like we were: one in front of the other under a clear plexiglass canopy high above Napa Valley, but we had one distinct advantage: we could see the mountain coming...

Several weeks before this strange flight Eric Berghorn and I were combing the steep slopes of Kimball Canyon. Its entire width, three-quarters of a mile across, was littered with shards of aluminum buried beneath manzanita brush and a half-century of forest duff! We first happened upon the wreckage in 1995 while approaching a remote, unclimbed cliff but failed to uncover the real story. Research revealed a tale of two Douglas Skyraiders that met their demise on Mount Saint Helena during a training flight in 1954. Assuming this to be the incident, we began the process of naming our new climbs, yet one...
detail remained problematic: we couldn’t find the actual impact site, and
the ancient photocopies of the report didn’t make sense. The search
continued each time we hiked up the canyon to climb. More pieces
were discovered, but the clues didn’t add up. The pictures we saw online
showed Navy planes painted blue, yet these were bare aluminum. I as-
sumed that once we found the fuselages it would make sense.
One evening I made a vague online post referencing our search.
Much to my surprise, I was put in contact with an archaeologist who was
at the time investigating the Skyraider site. It only took a few minutes
dialogue to confirm that Eric and I had encountered a different, little
known crash site with another untold story. It was apparent that the
names of some of our climbs, meant to honor history, were no longer
accurate.

On a stormy 19th of February, 1956, Lt Wesley Bigelow and 2nd Lt.
William Johnson left Novato’s Hamilton Airfield in a T33A trainer jet
eroute to Arizona. They were planning to climb to 39,000 feet but hit
extreme turbulence at only 3,700 feet. They advised the tower that
they were descending to 3,000 and lost contact just eight minutes after
take off. Five days later the plane was discovered at about 3,200 feet. It
had disintegrated across Kimball Canyon after glancing off a ridge just
before the Far Side.

The day after learning the true details of the crash, I had an
opportunity to go flying with local climber/pilot Chuck Newman. We
poured over the report then took off from Petaluma, anxious about our
mission to re-trace the fatal path. At 3,700 feet Chuck asked if I wanted
to fly the plane. I hesitated, then took the controls and turned to the
north.

Eric and I were involved in our own Hardy Boys mystery. Back on
the mountain we were bushwhacking through thick chaparrel when an
unusual tangle of wire caught my eye. I crawled on hands and knees up
the slope, pushed away the leaves and carefully overturned a scarred
piece of aluminum. Holding the artifact solemnly in my lap, I read the
words etched amongst round cutouts and smashed dials:

“Pilot’s Check List
T33A Airplane - 1 June 1948
Before Starting…”

In my hands was Lt Bigelow’s main instrument panel. My mind flashed
back to the haunting view over the nose of Chuck’s plane. I imagined
the pilots descending blindly through the clouds. Chuck and I had pulled
out of the flight path at the last second, but at jet speed it would have
been too late! I stared across the canyon to where the T33A irrevocably
struck the ridge. The remains of Bigelow and Johnson would forever
remain on the mountain. But for the names of a few rock climbs and
pieces of metal, there is little remembrance of their story.

The Wappo Tribe considered Mount Saint Helena to be the most
sacred mountain in northern California. They called it kana’ mota,
meaning “Human Mountain.” Situated in the Mayacamas Mountains at
the northern end and the Napa Valley, the mountain is rich with a history of
lively characters including the bandit Buck English, and this California
State Park’s namesake, Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson. The
former was a brash stagecoach robber, while the latter – a poet and ro-
mantic – honeymooned here in a mining shack for two months in 1880.
Stevenson describes the scene at Mount Saint Helena in the
introduction to his 1883 novel Silverado Squatters. Much has changed
since 1883, yet on a clear day from the 4,342 foot summit, one can still
see Mt. Shasta 192 miles to the north, the Sierra Nevada to the east, Mt.
Diablo 66 miles south, San Francisco’s skyline, the Golden Gate Bridge,
and the vast Pacific Ocean 30 miles west. Looming above Calistoga is a
line of tall bluffs known as the Napa Palisades.
The sight of these stately cliffs lured its first climbers in the late 1940s. Within a year of Bigelow and Johnson’s demise, the earliest verified ascents in the region were made by Steve Roper, Frank Sacherer, Jeff Foote, and Joe “Guido” Mckeown. Modern climbers were shocked to find tangible evidence of the early climbs and posted a photo online. Roper responded in his one and only Supertopo post: “By God, the bolts and hangers depicted are indeed mine. what a shock to see them! i placed them at Table rock in the saint helena Palisades in 1958. Here’s the odd thing. in what was perhaps the stupid- est move of my life, i thought that since the hangers would only have to hold my weight i could go on the cheap. My grandfather had saved all of his yearly auto metal license plates and i had these after his death. i used tin snips to cut out strips from a few plates, bent them with my fingers, punched a hole with a big nail, and, voila! in 30 minutes i had perhaps 20 of these wonders.”

Until recently, Table rock’s multi-pitch routes on crumbly tuff had largely been forgotten. For years, Bay Area climbers eschewed the Palisades in favor of Sierra granite. Most local climbers turned their attention to the more solid stone of Mount saint helena’s higher slopes. Early climbs such as the little-known Hailstone Crack (5.9), the burly Bear Crack (5.9+), and many of the hueco’d faces of Bubble rock were done in the ‘60s and ‘70s by ardent explorers Forrest Shute and Wade Mills. In late ‘70s and early ‘80s Ken Stanton and Robin Madwick were regulars. This was just before the dawn of sport climbing. The bold eighty foot climbs they established on the Far Side’s pocketed tuff have spooked many gym-certified leaders. By the mid ‘80s a new wave of strong climbers, namely Jordy Morgan and Jason Campbell, had established routes on the Bear Cliff’s steep quartzite. Route development has crept along, but over the last decade old cliffs have been rediscovered and new ones have been found. Aaron Rough and crew dusted off Table Rock and put in a number of long sport climbs on soft but interesting “stone.” The smaller Table Scraps have several easy, generously bolted lines with unique texture.

In 1990 i moved to the area, and like a typical frenetic teenager, climbed everything i could get my rope on. After doing the long approaches a few times i began to appreciate the 30-50 minute hikes. While attending college in Napa Valley, i was regularly on the mountain after classes and between weekend trips to the Sierra. Eric and i began exploring overlooked areas like the Satellite Rocks, Hailstone and Kimball Canyon, while also establishing new routes at the Bear Cliff.
Eric has been a prolific first ascensionist and one of Saint Helena’s most dedicated caretakers. He has spent endless days fixing trails after winter storms, picking up trash, cleaning routes and maintaining anchors. Mount Saint Helena is interesting in that, for better or worse, there are no facilities whatsoever, aside from a locked road for accessing radio towers. With little to maintain and no budget or management plan in place, the struggling State Parks Department appears to have left the mountain idle. A few concerned citizens and local groups have assumed a role of stewardship that makes this park a nearly sustainable model.

After 22 years of hiking up local hills, my enthusiasm for Mount Saint Helena has only increased. The volcanic bluffs offer pumpy climbing on rock that can be quite aesthetic yet painfully sharp. Good cracks are few and far between. Of the nearly 150 routes, most are bolt protected. The grinding approaches, warm temperatures, and sharp bushes are softened by stellar vistas and fresh air. I can look past these trivialities and recall many fine days spent with friends, watching the fog flow over coastal ridges from high above the wine country.

The mountain is no longer just a place where I climb but an entity in and of itself. Like the Wappo, I view it with deep reverence. From miners to bandits, poets to pilots, the sounds of history echo through the stone.
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When my friend Adam Thomason told me where the boulders were, I remember thinking: If it’s that close to the road, it’s probably been picked through years ago, and there’s no way this place could be that good. Yet as we turned off the highway onto one of Mammoth’s typical dirt road labyrinths, I remember trying to learn the correct turns - just incase the boulders were worthy of a second visit.

From the parking lot, Adam led me down a faint trail heading east into a cluster of boulders he called the Mad Max area. When I turned a corner and saw the south face of the Mad Max Boulder, I looked at Adam amazed. Just off the road, the boulder was hidden beneath the tall Jeffrey pines in a beautiful mountain scene. The climbing consisted of overhanging, clean, bullet-hard stone with interesting features and flat pumice landings.

Adam showed me what had been done and what hadn’t. The best-looking undone line was his project on the Mad Max boulder – a clean wall on the left with a long move in the middle. By the end of that hour or so session Adam came away with the first ascent of this project he later named Ambushed, a beautiful slightly overhanging V9 with classic moves on slopy dishes and pockets. I nabbed the first ascent of Welcome to the Thunderdome (V9), a classic link-up of the powerful lower section of Apocalypse Now (V7) into the crux top-half of Mad Max also V7. Later I found out this was Josh’s project (sorry dude).

After that, Adam took me on a tour of the area, showing me some nice lines at the Warm-Up Boulders and the short but hard projects that would later become the Fury Boulder Area. Then we went to the Road Boulder with its beautiful namesake highball, The Road (V6) and what would become Last Man Standing (V8), Bachar Ladder (V5) and the amazing roof prow The End of the Road (V12).

By the end of the day, I was blown away. I found myself going back to Hartley a few times a week until the snow forced us back down to Bishop for the winter. As soon as spring came around, we would drive up the road again, sometimes walking through feet of snow. We were just psyched to go climbing, but more importantly, we were eager to explore a new area with quality steep bouldering so close to the town of Mammoth.

The boulders at Hartley Springs were probably looked at years ago by the Stone Master generation, and a few climbs were most likely done. Hartley wasn’t rediscovered until the summer of 2007. It was Lonnie Kauk’s brother-in-law, Boone Jones, who noticed the Road Boulder. Boone told Lonnie to check it out. Around the same time Bishop-based climber Zach West was tipped off by his friend Gabe Normand who told him about the Mad Max Boulder.

Since that time, a host of local Eastern Sierra climbers including Zach West, Ian Cotter-Brown, Josh Vale, Nancy Egger, Adam Thomason, Abby Grooms and others have worked hard scrubbing lichen, cleaning loose rock and shredding their tips to climb these aesthetic new problems. This fun yet involved process has made Hartley the scenic playground it is today. As the area receives more traffic and media attention, problems like Bachar Ladder, The Road and Mad Max will surely be as well known as Change of Heart and High Plains Drifter.
The rocks at Hartley are a rare set for the volcanic tuff of the area. Spread out features and overhangs have created new school style problems that have set this place aside as a truly modern bouldering area. When you make it out here, bring a few pads. Although the landings are soft and flat most of the problems are tall and the cruxes are not always close to the ground. With the history of this place being so short, new lines are still being uncovered right in the main areas. A short walk could find you some unsimbed problems; however, if you want to check out some established classics, take a walk around these four spectacular boulders.

THE MAD MAX BOULDER: Only about a minute walk from the parking lot, the Mad Max Boulder is one of the best boulders on the east side of the Sierra - hosting 23 problems mostly in the V4 to V9 range. The slightly overhanging south face is the prize of the boulder, with 18 quality problems from V3 to V10. The center line up the east face is Mad Max (V7), a relatively straightforward yet technical problem that’s last sequence is one of the coolest around. Ambushed (V6) on the left side of the wall is another amazing line, featuring big spans on great rock. The right side of the wall may seem a bit clustered with variations, but once you climb each line you’ll realize each problem is pretty worthy. The original testpiece on the right is Apocalypse Now (V7) which features powerful underclinging moves that take you left to a long span to easier, but still cruxy climbing. Welcome to the Thunderdome (V9) combines the crux of Apocalypse Now to the top of Mad Max creating one of the best problems around. If you’re coming to check out the Mad Max Boulder be sure to hit it early or after 4 p.m. It sees the sun mid to late afternoon.

THE ROAD BOULDER: The Road Boulder is the other main attraction at Hartley, the northwest face has a few of the hardest problems in the Mammoth area. The End of the Road (V12) and its two variations. This side of the boulder also features some stellar highballs including Last Man Standing (V8), The Road (V6), Bachar Ladder (V5) and American Girl (V7), all of which are unique and have cool pockets on beautiful solid rock. The southeast side of the boulder has great warm-ups that aren’t as tall as the other side. Don’t miss Finger Buckets (V2) or (V3) from the sit or the fun traverse Snake Ploaken (V6), which climbs the entire backside of the boulder in either direction. If you’re coming to check the Road Boulder, be sure get there before 4 p.m. or after sunset. The west face sees the sun mid until late afternoon.

THE FURY BOULDER AND JUDGMENT DAY Although it’s small, the Fury Boulder contains great movement on solid rock. Two Moves of Fury (V6) is just that: two hard moves. But it’s an area classic and it feels really good to stick the second move. The boulder also has three other problems on it, Two Moves’ neighbor, One Move of Fury (V6) (a fairly dyno), the cool polished pockets of Stick Rick (V7) and One Eyed (V6). Just up the hill from the Fury Boulder is Judgment Day, a sweet V3 highball that has a long crux move at the top for making for an exciting final sequence. The Fury Boulder and Judgment Day are in the shade from around noon until sunset.

GETTING THERE:
From Mammoth Lakes and the south: From the junction of Highways 203/395 east of mammoth follow Highway 395 north for 14.3 miles - the hidden turn off for Hartley is on the left (north) side of the highway across from Pumice Mine Road. From Lee Vining and the north: From the 120 west/395 junction head south on Highway 395 for 10.9 miles to the turn on the right-hand side. Coming this way the turn is 0.4 miles after the June Lake junction. From the turnoff of 395: Head southeast for less than 0.1 miles to a three-way fork. Take the middle road for about 1 mile to a two-way fork, at this fork take the right road for 0.9 miles, to the top, obvious parking area in front of the dirt lake barricades. 11 miles from Highway 395.

WHERE TO STAY:
The Boulders at Hartley Springs are on National Forrest land and camping is allowed most anywhere. With that in mind please try to choose a site that has previously been used and also please do not camp in the parking lot of the area. This place sees lots of traffic and not only from climbers. For the best camping at Hartley drive west past the parking lot of the climbing area about a half mile to a big wide-open area that overlooks June and Mono Lakes.

FIVE STAR ROUTES:
Ambushed (V7), Mad Max (V7), Welcome to the Thunderdome (V6), The Road (V6), Bachar Ladder (V6), The End of the Road (V12), Judgement Day (V3) and Finger Buckets (V2).

GUIDEBOOK:
Mammoth Bouldering, a locally produced and self-published guidebook is available at Mammoth Mountain in Mammoth Lakes and Wilson’s Eastside Sports in Bishop, or check out the website Mammothboulderingguidebook.com.
Mammoth Bouldering
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www.organicclimbing.com
In October of 2009, Katie Lambert, Ben Dittlo, a Slovenian climber named Luka and I climbed on the northwestern face of Yosemite’s Middle Cathedral. The route, Border Country, was named after a poem written by a well-known climber. The night before the climber’s death in an avalanche in China, he scrawled a few lines in his journal about the climbing life, of living in the Border Country.

When we reached the rock cliff just before Gunsight Gully, I realized I had left my chalkbag in the car. I ran down to get it. Katie was waiting when she heard a voice cry, “Heeey kay-tee!” Ben offered to tag our water up the first 200 feet. I’d told Katie that Ben was a Utah sport climber. She was sure he’d suck. But the way he’d said hey, the way he’d said her name, she thought “whoa who is this person?”

We climbed all day but hardly saw Luka and Ben. They were too far ahead. Every once in awhile, Katie caught glimpses of a flashing smile, weird long hair and a bandana. Ben was climbing smoothly up the wall. On the crux pitch, he broke a horn but caught himself on a hold below. Despite the technical granite climbing, it was one of those days when Ben couldn’t fall.

At the top of the headwall, Katie led to the stance where Ben was taking pictures. He first saw her through a camera lens. She arrived at the belay and went to lower down. She clipped a single biner and a mess of old webbing left by the first ascensionist. Ben thought, “Whoa. Either she really knows what she’s doing or she’s kind of sketchy.”

When the shadow of the Nose hit the Zodiac, we rappelled. We cramped into tiny belay stations. Katie and I were at the bottom. Luka and Ben, who had helmets, were on top. We held out backpacks over our heads so we wouldn’t get pummeled by the rocks when we pulled our ropes.

At one ledge, while we waited for Luka to rappel, there was a conversation about relationships. “Well, what’s up? Any prospects?” Ben asked Katie. “No!” Katie replied. “I’m sure they’re lined ten deep” Ben said, shaking his head.

We continued down the route. Ben talked about Keep the River on Your Right, the story of an artist and anthropologist who travels into the jungles of Peru. Ben was being characteristically smooth, living up to his nickname The Coffee Shop Killer.

The climbing, the pictures, and the scary rappels created a wild adventure. Pretty exciting. It was almost as exciting as when Katie Lambert got lost inside her sleeping bag. Almost.

When we got down, we parted ways. Katie looked for Ben in Camp 4 a few days later, but Ben was climbing on El Cap. They stayed in touch while he went to Patagonia. In the spring, Ben met Katie in Ridgecrest, when her car broke down. They climbed in Bishop and became partners.

On June 22, below the Sierra Nevada, the pair married in front of friends and family. They vowed to love each other, to grow together and to live a life in the border country.

Congratulations, Katie and Ben.